

Bella Swan versus Katniss Everdeen: A Cultural Examination of *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games*

Research Thesis

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by

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PREFACE

My introduction to the *Twilight* series started in high school; my best friend had read all the books and begged me to join her on opening night for the movie's premier. I did not know much about the series, only that it centered on a human girl and vampire boy, and did not see any problem with it at the time so I agreed to join her. By the time I graduated high school I had been dragged to the subsequent movies within the series by either friends or my mom and had not enjoyed a single moment of my time spent in the theaters watching those movies. I always sensed the series was not a positive representation for men or women, but I wasn't equipped with the knowledge or resources as a high school student to really identify just what was wrong with the film/book series. Once I began college this lack of knowledge quickly changed; I took an interest in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and began to develop a critical feminist lens that I applied to my every day life. As I started my second semester as a third year English major, my department advisor suggested that I write a thesis my senior year. After contemplating several different topics, I decided I wanted to spend my time and effort on something relevant to what I experience and interact with on a day-to-day basis as a young woman. My decision to analyze the cultural phenomenon of the *Twilight* series stemmed from my interest in how much, if at all, books like *Twilight* could impact young men and women. After my initial meeting with my advisor, and his suggestion to place Stephenie Meyers' series in conversation with another young adult American literature series, I chose *The Hunger Games* series as the second set of texts to examine with this critical feminist lens.

The two texts are very different; *Twilight* features a love story between Bella Swan, an ordinary human, and Edward Cullen, a charming vampire. *Twilight* and the

following three books focus on the ups and downs of Bella and Edward's relationship and the added love interest of Jacob Black, a muscular werewolf who becomes infatuated with Bella and jealous of Edward. The text has elements of the supernatural and fantastic, but retains the basic formula of the high school love triangle. *The Hunger Games* and the following two books narrate the struggles of Katniss Everdeen in the dystopian, futuristic District 12. The books seem to cover more mature, harsh topics that deal with political and economic inequality (the Capitol, the bourgeoisie, and its surrounding districts, the proletariat). The series documents Katniss' fight to survive in The Hunger Games, an annual Capitol tradition where 'Tributes' from each district fight each other to the death with one standing victor, and her rise as the face and leader of the revolution against the Capitol. The science fiction genre drives *The Hunger Games'* story, adding futuristic, dystopian, and post-apocalyptic elements. These series, at first glance, are dramatically different and offer distinctive elements of fantasy to which readers are invited to escape. But several factors within each novel make Katniss Everdeen and Bella Swan more similar than first appearances suggest; both young women navigate their identities in unusual circumstances, while battling inner turmoil as to which of two boys they should pursue a relationship.

While in the process of reading these materials, it was interesting to have conversations with my friends who had read these books as 13, 14, and 15 year olds, not as a 21-year-old college student. When I would provide them with examples of how both Bella Swan and Katniss Everdeen embodied negative representations of gender, my friends would become defensive, rebutting my arguments. These male and female college students had become emotionally attached to these books; they spent countless nights

reading past their bedtime to learn if Bella successfully transitions into a vampire, or to see if Katniss Everdeen wins the Hunger Games. I couldn't blame them for their defense; if someone were to critique my favorite novel that I enjoyed as a teenager I would have had the same adverse reaction. While I acknowledged their emotional attachment to these novels, I did not disregard my friends' defenses and how their protective nature implied the immense impact these books had in their youth. The nature of my thesis and the research I have conducted is to not wholly spurn the *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games* series, but to provide a thoughtful examination of young adult literature in regards to gender, race, and class and more deliberate consideration of the impacts of these "franchise" series on young people today.

The majority of *The Hunger Games* and *Twilight* readers tend to be young adults (young women more specifically for *Twilight*). Of course this is not the only demographic that reads these books, but the young adult demographic is certainly worthy of examination considering both of these books are targeted towards young men and women. The age range of young adults (roughly between 12-18) typically involves the process of identity formation and puberty. With such dramatic transitions in body and mind occurring, is it possible that digesting stereotypical representational information, from literature, will influence a young man or woman's concept of self and other? According to "A Boyfriend to Die For: Edward Cullen as Compensated Psychopath in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*":

Girls have a special relationship with books (Blackford, 2004; Cherland, 1994).

Cherland argues that girls read within a culture that is socially constructed around

gender roles. Girls interact with texts such as books in multiple ways that ultimately reflect expectations of their place in the social order. (Merskin 173)

Anna Silver, in “Twilight is Not Good for Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family in Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* Series,” complements Merskin’s research: “It has become axiomatic in analysis of YA literature that most of these texts are concerned with both the experience of adolescence and with a young person’s formation of identity” (Silver 123). As suggested by the work of scholars such as Merskin and Silver, it is extremely likely for books like *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games* to impact its young adult audience. This research justifies examining characters like Bella Swan and Katniss Everdeen for their potential impact during the critical time of a young man or woman’s life in which they begin to develop independence and a sense of self.

The literary and box office records that *The Hunger Games* and the *Twilight* series hold prove the series’ popularity within today’s culture. The financial success of Suzanne Collins and Stephenie Meyer’s books document their pervasiveness; *The Hunger Games* series sold over 50 million copies in the U.S. alone (thewire.com) and the *Twilight* franchise is estimated to “have earned \$2.5 billion at the global box office” (forbes.com). These two franchises reach a broad audience in American culture; children as young as elementary school students and grown adults find themselves engrossed with the characters of Katniss Everdeen and Bella Swan. The two series have become much more than a collection of books: from Barbie dolls, to notebooks, to bed comforters, these series have taken on a fandom so broad and diverse that *Harry Potter* is no longer the only favorite children’s character (thewire.com). With such a far-reaching audience and a fiscally positive reception to these books, the impact of these beloved series is worth

examining more closely. Are *The Hunger Games* and the *Twilight* series more than books; can they leave a lasting impression on its audience and maybe even Western culture as a whole? Applying a critical feminist and cultural lens when comparing and contrasting *The Hunger Games* and *Twilight* series will allow for an objective approach to determining the impact of the books on today's culture. Examining the representations of gender, race, and class within the two sets of texts provides the audience with analytical, tangible evidence to determine how much of an impact these books can have.

SECTION TWO

The cultural backlash against the *Twilight* series demonstrates the overall critical attitude towards the story; one quick Google search of “Twilight Review” shows an average rating of two and a half stars (out of five) for the movie. The books are easy to read and offer a compelling plot line, but most critics agree that the problematic underlying issues of the subject matter overshadow the surface material. Elizabeth Hand’s 2008 review, “Love Bites,” for *The Washington Post* expresses how the pull of the storyline appeals to broad audiences, but how society should approach the story with caution:

Yet there's something distinctly queasy about the male-female dynamic that emerges over the series' 2,446 pages. Edward...doesn't behave anything like a real teenager. He talks and acts like an obsessively controlling adult male...Bella consistently describes herself as stupid, accident-prone, unworthy of her beloved's affection. Edward incessantly warns her not to hurt herself, and indeed she makes enough trips to the emergency room that it's a wonder social services never investigates her home life. And there are constant reminders that she's not responsible for the effect she has on Edward or Jacob. This bland passivity has been excused as a way of allowing female readers to project themselves into Bella's place, but the overall effect is a weird infantilization that has repellent overtones to an adult reader and hardly seems like an admirable model to foist upon our daughters (or sons). (Hand)

As Hand’s comments suggest, the popularity of these books and the perceived innocence of the text have not caused readers to overlook the circumscriptive gender roles assigned

to the main characters of *Twilight*. Hand's observations touch upon one of the biggest issues within *Twilight*; the gender politics between Bella, Edward, and Jacob demarcate desirable gender roles and stereotypes for audience members.

The depiction of gender in the *Twilight* series provides the reader with evidence of a dichotomous representation of the male and female gender; the young adult texts reinscribe these cultural constructs, naturalizing male and female-specific characteristics and images. The social construct of gender rigidly pairs biological sex with prescribed actions, behaviors, emotions, clothing, lifestyle choices, political, economic, and social activities and limits the expression of self. These limitations perpetuate stereotypes, prejudices, violence, bullying, inequality, and other social issues that affect both the male and female sex. Stereotypical images of gender can include anything as concrete as gendered colors (blue/pink) and gendered activities (fixing a car/baking a cake) to something more abstract, such as gendered attitudes (male provider/ 'ladylike' behavior). Images and representations of gender that culturally 'match' with biological sex narrow perspectives as to which individual expressions can be considered 'appropriate.'

The representations of both the male and female genders within the *Twilight* series have the potential to polarize a young reader's mind, influencing not only how they see others, but also how they see themselves. Bella's self doubt and worry of her appearance—"Maybe, if I looked like a girl from Phoenix should, I could work this to my advantage. But physically, I'd never fit in anywhere. I *should* be tan, sporty, blonde – a volleyball player, or a cheerleader, perhaps – all the tings that go with living in the valley of the sun" (Meyer 10)—or Jacob's 'husky' voice asking overtly masculine questions: "“You wouldn't happen to know where I could get my hands on a master cylinder for a 1986

Volkswagen Rabbit?'" (Meyer 120) point to these gender roles. These images of young men and women within both set of texts subconsciously reinforces stereotypical male and female performances. Edward and Jake's brute strength, Bella's interior scrutiny of her appearance, the jealousy of Bella's male friends, and the lack of female companionship all allude to an imaginary set of rules and binaries for the male and female gender. In the tenth chapter of *Twilight*, Edward's physical description is nothing less than a description of a Greek god: "[Bella] noticed [Edward] wore no jacket himself, just a light gray knit V-neck shirt with long sleeves. Again, the fabric clung to his perfectly muscled chest. It was a colossal tribute to his face that it kept [Bella's] eyes away from his body" (Meyer 197). The simple exchange between Edward and Bella in the seventh chapter demonstrates the gender hierarchy between male and female: "'Drink,' [Edward] ordered. [Bella] sipped at [her] soda obediently" (Meyer 149). The traditional roles that each of these characters fall into offer literary evidence as to how representations of the male and female gender are often limited and lack elasticity, and when these traditional roles are 'broken' there are social ramifications. Critiquing the performance of gender for characters of Bella, Edward, and Jacob begin the process of identifying problematic characteristics of these main characters.

Bella Swan in *Twilight* offers an array of antiquated characteristic gendered traits. Her dependency on Edward, her inability to physically/emotionally live without him, her daily cooking and cleaning tasks for her father, her disinterest in friendships, and her eager compliancy all grant Bella as a heavily gendered character. For example, Bella fills the mold of stereotypical female caretaker: "'Bells, I fed myself [Charlie] for seventeen years before you got here,' he reminded me [Bella]. 'I don't know how you survived,' I

muttered, then added more clearly, ‘I’ll leave some things for cold-cut sandwiches in the fridge, okay? Right on top’” (Meyer 149). Or the series offers the outdated characterization that women are incapable of saving themselves, making Bella rely on Edward as her “perpetual savior” (Meyer 166). Bella’s traditional femininity transcribe an idealized romantic notion within Stephenie Meyer’s books; a young woman falls madly and irrevocably in love with a ‘charming’ young man and spends the rest of her life in marital bliss. But when Bella never demonstrates independence and refuses to live a life void of Edward, young women may be encouraged to believe that dependency of a male counterpart is the ultimate goal, the fairy-tale ending. Bella chooses to not attend college, or seek a career; she becomes a mother at just 19, and she distances herself from her family and friends all in the name of love. “*Twilight*: The Glamorization of Abuse, Codependency, and White Privilege” by Danielle N. Borgia furthers this argument: “This pleasure in surrender, and the privileging of lust over respect, common interests, and intellectual connection promotes female subordination to a controlling male partner as highly attractive and rewarding” (Borgia 158). Meyer’s novel delivers a black and white portrayal of gender: the woman tends to the home and children, while the man takes care of his family and these representations reflects back to her readers.

Bella’s one-sided female representation impacts the young demographic that the *Twilight* series reaches, shaping how young adults form their identities and categorize the world in which they live in (cooking for women, fixing a car for men). Bella’s limited actions and roles within the series, paired with the hyper masculine Edward and Jacob, normalize these images of gender for young adults and teenagers. In turn, younger generations synthesize these binary images and begin to develop their own performances

of gender. The impact fiction has on young readers, especially girls, becomes problematic when considering how rigid the gender politics in the *Twilight* series is. Charles Sarland's research in "Critical Tradition and Ideological Positioning" examines how the images and themes within young adult literature influence and impact the intended audience: "The research evidence...uncovers a complex picture of the young seeking ways to take control over their own lives, and using the fiction that they enjoy as one element in that negotiation of cultural meaning and value" (Sarland 44). These images in fiction engross readers, and they do not simply read the text, but rather learn from it. A recent cultural example of this is the feminine product brand, Always, and their "#LikeAGirl" campaign. A three minute clip details an older generation of both men and women produce actions that match the phrase 'like a girl:' when asked to run, participants humorously and casually run while playing with their hair, or when asked to fight like a girl, pitiful slapping and cowering ensues. As the video progresses, a younger generation of preadolescent girls are asked to complete the same tasks as the older generation. Their actions differ dramatically from the first group: they run in place with ferocity, they punch the air with certainty, and they throw a fictitious ball with accuracy. This example solidifies the arguments of researches such as Charles Sarland, Danielle N. Borgia, Debra Merskin, and Anna Silver: the texts that young adult readers interact with directly impact how they act/behave in relation to socially constructed gender scripts.

Just as traditional female gender roles can be detrimental to young readers, so can traditional male gender roles. Within *Twilight*, Stephenie Meyer offers a plethora of conventional male-gendered performances that saturate the text with brawn and violence. The physical description of Edward and Jacob abides by cultural norms: they are tall,

dark (Jacob is physically dark, and Edward is shrouded in mystery), and incredibly handsome. Their hard (Edward's diamond-like skin, as Bella's broken hand after punching Jacob makes painfully clear) bodies and suave demeanors espouse an idealization of traditional roles for men: Edward's body as "marble contours...[and] perfect musculature," (Meyer 256) and Jacob's 6'2 stature (Meyer 489) hint at some of the physical makeup of the two main characters. The physical framework of Jacob and Edward echo their internal/emotional strength and power, the young men exude authority and control over Bella and predicate themselves as caretakers responsible for Bella's wellbeing. Hyper masculine features and dominant personalities position Edward and Jacob as the ultimate suitors for Bella. Classmates of Bella, such as Mike, who appear less 'manly,' are quickly dismissed in Bella's eyes. In the second book, *New Moon*, Bella agrees to go a movie with Mike and Jacob in an attempt to forget about Edward after their break up. As the trio watches a particularly gory movie, Mike falls ill from the subject matter and has to excuse himself. As Bella and Jacob wait, Jacob offers his opinions of Mike: "What a marshmallow. You should hold out for someone with a stronger stomach. Someone who laughs at the gore that makes weaker men vomit" (Meyer 211). Jacob's comments signify how 'weaker' men who do not exhibit both a strong personality and physicality should not be as desirable to women.

This privileging of the 'macho man' extends past the *Twilight* series, of course; advertisements, movies, actors, literature, TV shows, comics, and other popular culture mediums have praised the burly man for his brute strength and power. Of course there are counter examples of this, but the overwhelming presence of this hyper masculinity make these counter examples few and far between. Considering the characterization of

Jacob and Edward, especially in conversation with other male characters in *Twilight*, Meyer's idea of what makes a man attractive and worthy lies in his physicality and ability. R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt's "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept" reflect how the idealization of masculinity within western culture impact men:

Thus, hegemonic masculinities can be constructed that do not correspond closely to the lives of any actual men. Yet these models do, in various ways, express widespread ideals, fantasies, and desires. They provide models of relations with women and solutions to problems of gender relations. Furthermore, they articulate loosely with the practical constitution of masculinities as ways of living in everyday local circumstances. To the extent they do this, they contribute to hegemony in the society-wide gender order as a whole. (Connell and Messerschmidt 838)

As Connell and Messerschmidt state, images and themes of masculinity in texts such as *Twilight* contribute to ideals, fantasies, and desires of masculinity that speak to young readers, both men and women. Even more alarming, these images and themes that young adults digest influence relation dynamics between genders, and as Danielle N. Borgia demonstrated in her research, interaction between men and women experience cultural and literary influence. This desire for manly men in *Twilight* reflects our culture at large. The value assigned to muscles and emotionlessness is of high commodity within our culture; when texts such as *Twilight* reinforce these idealized notions of men, the male gender and power become tantamount.

Another aspect of gender politics within *Twilight* presents itself in the form of male validation: Bella receives attention from almost all of her classmates, and Edward

and Jacob constantly reassure her of her striking beauty. These interactions Bella has with her male counterparts should reflect how the young girl feels about herself, but she constantly doubts her physical appearance: “‘Well, look at me,’ I [Bella] said, unnecessarily as [Edward] was already staring. ‘I’m absolutely ordinary...and look at you.’ I waved my hand toward him and all his bewildering perfection” (Meyer 210). In the proceeding lines, Edward assures Bella that she is the opposite of ordinary, that her physical beauty is like none that he has ever seen before. Linda K. Christian-Smith’s essay “Sweet Dreams: Gender and Desire in Teen Romance Novels” discusses one of young adult literature’s most problematic themes that we see within *Twilight*: young adult romances entail

A fictional world where men give meaning and completeness to women’s lives...the ‘Cinderella’ and ‘Sleeping Beauty’ metaphors endlessly repeat themselves as boys give girls completeness at the moment of the first kiss. Girls are constructed as objects of other’s desires with few desires of their own.

(Christian-Smith 46)

Christian-Smith’s statements correspond with the text of *Twilight*; Bella’s doubt of her beauty and ability only diminish once assurances of the opposite sex (Edward) have been made. Bella’s need for external positive affirmation (even then, Bella never fully believes she deserves Edward) devalues Bella in the reader’s eyes; a young woman cannot reach her potential until the introduction of a male suitor takes place. This lack of confidence on the part of female protagonists in young adult novels privileges the “innate” confidence of men. The male validation of a woman’s beauty and ability

negates any agency attributed towards women; this validation implies a lack of worth for women without a male counterpart to bestow value.

SECTION THREE

Within critical circles the overall response to the *Twilight* series was negative, reading it as “anti-abortion, abstinence porn” (Cochrane, “Stephenie Meyer on *Twilight*, Feminism, and True Love”). Christine Seifert’s review for *Bitch Magazine*, “Bite Me! (Or Don’t)” reflects many other reviews of *Twilight*, both academic and more informal analyses:

Ultimately it’s a statement the sexual politics of Meyer’s abstinence message: Whether you end up doing the nasty or not doesn’t ultimately matter. When it comes to a woman’s virtue, sex, identity, or her existence itself, it’s all in the man’s hands. To be the object of desire, in abstinence porn is not really so far from being the object of desire in actual porn. (Seifert 3)

With the arrival of *The Hunger Games* in 2008, the series quickly became hailed as the “anti *Twilight*,” offering a stark contrast to Meyers’ series. Katha Pollitt’s “*The Hunger Games*’ Feral Feminism” represents the overall praise *The Hunger Games* received: “Katniss is a rare thing in pop fiction: a complex female character with courage, brains and a quest of her own...the opposite of Bella, the famously drippy, love-obsessed heroine of the *Twilight* books” (Pollitt 10). Despite such celebration on the part of many cultural and feminist critics, however, literary evidence also demonstrates how these two series provide audience members with similarly problematic representations of gender. The characterization of Bella and Katniss are indeed different, and both have positive and negative characteristics, but what is worth exploring is how similar these two women are in regards to their gender roles.

Bella Swan, as demonstrated in the previous section, lacks gender fluidity, swimming in standard female gender roles. On the other hand, Katniss' personality and thoughts seem to reflect a gender-fluid sense of self; she demonstrates indifference to her appearance or clothing, she supports her family, and she participates in activities that are often associated with the male gender (hunting, fighting, 'hot-headed,' prideful actions, etc.). Katniss' expertise with her bow and arrow present a female who does not limit herself because of her biological sex: "The bow and arrow is my weapon. But I've spent a fair amount of time throwing knives as well. Sometimes, if I've wounded an animal with an arrow, it's better to get a knife into it, too, before I approach it" (Collins 48). The knowledge and skill set Katniss possesses allows for a broader representation of a young woman; by participating in 'non-feminine' activities, Katniss' character lies outside the cultural norm. In *Time* magazine's article "Teen-Heroine Smackdown: 5 Ways Katniss is Better than Bella," Eliana Dockterman goes so far as to state that Katniss Everdeen is the antithesis of Bella Swan, "when it comes to the heroines representing these series, *The Hunger Games*' Katniss Everdeen is indisputably better than *Twilight*'s Bella Swan" (Dokterman). But while Katniss as an individual character may not limit herself to gender, her culture, and the audience in front of which she preforms, assign Katniss to traditional female roles, behaviors, and actions.

The characterizations of Suzanne Collins' female protagonist offer insight as to how gender binaries can often prevent and discourage gender fluidity and neutrality. In the beginning of the text, Katniss defies standard gender roles as she describes how she feels about her hunting partner, Gale: "He's good-looking... You can tell by the way the girls whisper about him when he walks by in school that they want him. It makes me

jealous but not for the reason people would think. Good hunting partners are hard to find” (Collins 10). Katniss’ thoughts about Gale and how other women treat him take a stereotypical approach for women, jealousy and possessive behavior over men, and erases the stigma. Instead, Katniss’ jealousy of losing her potential hunting partner to another girl acknowledges the outdated gender role and approaches the behavior with a sense of business and wit. Another example of Katniss’ lack of personal femininity concerns her feelings and attitude towards her sister’s cat, Buttercup. Katniss’ disdain for the cat stems from the provider role Katniss takes on for her family: “The last thing I needed was another mouth to feed” (Collins 3). This economical outlook Katniss is characterized with eliminates numerous gender binaries that women are often given within literature: possessive, boy-crazy, maternal, and emotional. Instead, Katniss is the provider, the gatherer, the hunter, the businesswoman within her family and she certainly does not tolerate emotion when making decisions. This characterization of Katniss remains throughout the series (reflected by the first person narration), but soon after the District 12 Tribute is chosen for the 74th Hunger Games, the young woman finds her gender performance placed under critical scrutiny from the Capitol audience.

It is important to note that regardless of who is criticizing Katniss’ gender, whether that is herself or the villainous Capitol, the problematic nature of critiquing one’s gender remains the same. It is the fact that Katniss’ gender and femininity are the identities called into question and manipulated to make her seem more appealing to the Capitol audience that warrant ideological questioning when we consider the potential impact on young readers. Despite Collin’s overt attempt to blame the Capitol for Katniss’ feminine transformation, the issues of transforming and evaluating a young

woman's femininity, regardless of who or what is offering these assessments, remains highly problematic. The narration of the Capitol blatantly labels the Panem dictatorship as an unfair, distrustful, and abusive tyranny; and the characters' actions, behaviors, and thoughts reflect this anger towards the Capitol. Collins' writing and narration of *The Hunger Games*' Capitol, if read critically, can be easily identified. Mature audiences are more likely to understand the critique Collins' is offering on behalf of corrupt governments; but this may not be the same for Collins' younger audience, the audience that the series is marketed towards. It is important to consider this when examining how young readers interact with Collins' text. Moving forward in this argument, it is important to consider that even though the audience may be aware of the Capitol's oppression, the critical surveillance of gender within the text presents readers with a central message of transforming a young woman into a likeable, more feminine version of herself in order to appease standard concepts of gender.

It is soon after Katniss volunteers as Tribute that the reader can begin to see the forced transformation Katniss is expected to undergo. Once Katniss has volunteered as a participant in the Hunger Games and requires interview coaching, her outward appearance and personality falls under microscopic observation: "The next hours are agonizing. At once, it's clear I cannot gush. We try me playing cocky, but I just don't have the arrogance. Apparently, I'm too 'vulnerable' for ferocity. I'm not witty. Funny. Sexy. Or mysterious (Collins 118)". Not only does Katniss receive external critical feedback of who she is and how she presents herself, but the young Tribute also begins to second-guess herself and her identity. The internal and external critique that Katniss faces heightens when comparing the critique her male counterpart experiences. In

chapter four of *The Hunger Games*, after Haymitch offers Peeta sarcastic advice during training, Peeta becomes angry at Haymitch for his half-hearted attempt to help the District 12 Tributes and knocks a glass out of Haymitch's hand. In response, Haymitch strikes Peeta in the face leaving a bruise and when Peeta reaches for ice, Haymitch stops him commanding Peeta to ““Let the bruise show. The audience will think you've mixed it up with another Tribute before you've even made it to the arena”” (Collins 57).

Haymitch's desire to paint a picture of Peeta as a tough, aggressive competitor mimics the gender roles that men are expected to exhibit. The advisers' demand for a more feminized, tame version of Katniss and a display of violence from Peeta provide the audience with concrete evidence of the Capitol's oppression. The manipulation and displeasure of Katniss' femininity complicates how readers interact with and interpret a strong, gender-neutral character such as Katniss. Surely, readers can identify that the Capitol's enforced gender roles subjugate the powerless, but can these stereotypical roles still impart negative images onto the reader? The gender politics in *The Hunger Games* present problematic and archaic beliefs of gender and reinforce narrow views that limit how our culture views and treats men and women.

Katniss' transformation in the first book stems from a desire for Katniss to become a more likeable competitor in the Hunger Games, and in turn this increases her chances of survival. Makeup, traditional gowns and dresses, waxing of body hair, a love story, and male counterpart are all introduced into Katniss' life once she takes center stage. What is so problematic about Katniss' transformation is the Capitol's captivation with 'the girl on fire' once her transformation is complete. Why does *The Hunger Games* have to constantly remind its audience of Katniss' femininity? How can her non-

femininity be such an issue to the Capitol audience? The Capitol and District audiences' captivation with the more feminine Katniss implies not only a backlash against gender neutrality, but also a celebration of traditional gender roles. While the book never explicitly explains why the Capitol and Districts approve of Katniss once she undergoes a physical transformation, it is suggested that Katniss's lack of femininity is viewed as a threat. It seems Katniss' lack of femininity is synonymous with rebellion; the unwilling nature of Katniss to conform to stereotypical gender roles speaks of the young woman's resolve and individuality. Once Katniss develops a complacency that suppresses her opposition to her government and an established romance between her and Peeta takes place, the Capitol and viewers from other districts begin to love Katniss. While the message may be clear with this critical lens applied, are young audiences aware (either consciously or subconsciously) of what Collins may be arguing. Does the likability Katniss inherits once the Capitol transforms her into a more feminine individual suggest a cultural desire for women's complacency? Radical departures from feminized behavior and actions for women imply a threat of death in *The Hunger Games*, as Katniss' makeover ensures a higher survivability rate. And if Collins' critique on defying female gender roles is unintentional, what is to be said about the transformation of Katniss? Does the young District 12 Tribute's makeover warrant gender stereotypes/prejudices? The act of physically and mentally transforming Katniss to comply with specific standards of femininity stabilizes the unruly, outspoken District 12 Tribute. While the demographic may span farther than *Twilight's*, the majority of Suzanne Collins' readers are young adults/teenagers. What are the consequences and learned behaviors that these young adults take away from *The Hunger Games* series? Do the physical and social

limitations that Katniss' advisors require of the young woman cast larger implications for readers than just what is printed on the page? Considering Merskin's research, Katniss Everdeen's lack of appeal to her audience and her transformation could potentially reinforce black and white notions of the male and female gender.

Similarly in *The Hunger Games*, Katniss' circumstances provoke an ongoing inward and outward evaluation of the young woman. Katniss' appearance becomes one of her lifelines within the books: her physical appeal to the Capitol audience and the love interest between her and Peeta, demonstrate Katniss' beauty and worth. After an interview where Peeta deceptively proclaims his love for Katniss, Haymitch explains to Katniss why Peeta's proclamation is so important:

"It was my idea," says Peeta, wincing as he pulls spikes of pottery from his palms.

"Haymitch just helped me with it."

"Yes, Haymitch is very helpful. To you!" I [Katniss] say.

"You *are* a fool," Haymitch says in disgust. "Do you think he hurt you? That boy just gave you something you could never achieve on your own."

"He made me look weak!" I say.

"He made you look desirable! And let's face it, you can use all the help you can get in that department. You were about as romantic as dirt until he said he wanted you. Now they all do. You're all they're talking about. The star-crossed lover from District Twelve!" Says Haymitch. (Collins 135)

After this conversation with Haymitch and Peeta, Katniss becomes astutely aware of how this fictitious relationship with Peeta has awarded her the Capitol's favor. "Witnessing this spectacle, Katniss understands that her gender performance is part of a dialogue

between herself and the crowd. She can get what she needs by giving them what they want” (DeaVault 195). Rodney M. DeaVault’s observations in his essay, “The Masks of Femininity,” highlight one of the most problematic issues within *The Hunger Games*. Is there a negative subtext to Katniss being valued only once she has become the object of a man’s desire and experienced a physical transformation? DeaVault approaches how within his essay: “as a Hunger Games tribute, Katniss realizes that her physical appeal to viewers is intrinsic to her survival as her hunting ability since viewers sponsor the tributes they find most engaging, send gift to aid them during the Games” (DeaVault 194). The love story between Katniss and Peeta places a positive, but critical attention upon Katniss, transforming her from a no-name Tribute, to one of the most favored individuals in the Hunger Games. The addition of physically appealing clothing/make up and romance to Katniss’ character and the concurrent spike in audience interest suggest a discrepancy in Collin’s message and Katniss’ narration.

Reflecting on Katniss’ transformation of gender throughout *The Hunger Games* highlights some of the biggest concerns when reading Collins’ series. Similarly to *Twilight*, Linda K. Christian-Smith’s essay “Sweet Dreams: Gender and Desire in Teen Romance Novels,” also applies to *The Hunger Games*. Katniss’ validation and worth from her transformation and relationship with Peeta reflect a ‘Cinderella’ and ‘Sleeping Beauty’ traditional story (Christian-Smith 46). The gender critique and male validation of Katniss’ beauty and ability negates any agency attributed towards the District 12 Tribute; she no longer exhibits a strong, gender-neutral self, but rather a produced product of the Capitol. Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Emily D. Ryalls critical study, “*The Hunger Games*: Preforming Not-preforming to Authenticate Femininity and Whiteness,”

express concerns of Katniss' gender surveillance.

[Katniss'] agency and desires (she is active, physically strong, indifferent to romance and motherhood) suggest a feminist protagonist who diverges from conventions of feminine behavior. However, dig a little deeper and we see that how she is presented as heroic is decidedly not feminist: her heroism premised on...her naturalized heterosexual femininity, and her effortless abilities as a potential future wife and mother. (Dubrofsky and Ryalls 407)

Dubrofsky and Ryalls unpack some of the biggest issues within Collins' texts: Katniss' feminization via the Capitol and her proceeding actions and characteristics limit her to a highly structuralized binary set of rules for the male and female gender. Once we are able to identify how Katniss' submission to external criticism influences and transforms her own sense of self, we can acquire a greater understanding of how the young reader may interpret this text as a 'Cinderella' story of sorts.

SECTION FOUR

Similarly to portrayals of gender, class, ethnicity, and race play a paramount role in how audience members implicitly construct representations of different groups of people. When culturally critiquing a worldwide phenomenon such as *Twilight* or *The Hunger Games*, it is important to identify the intersections of certain social constructs in order to better understand the impact that these stories can have on culture.

Intersectionality is an analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with other identities and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege ...

Intersectional analysis aims to reveal multiple identities, exposing the different types of discrimination and disadvantage that occur as a consequence of the combination of identities. (lgbtq.unc.edu)

The definition that The University of North Carolina's LGBTQ Center offers for intersectionality emphasizes the intertwined and complex relationship between different social, political, and economic identities. The intersection of race, ethnicity, and class within Meyer and Collins' novels exemplifies the formulaic representation of specific groups. Meyer and Collins' characters illustrate the negative, ubiquitous cultural images for social indicators of race, ethnicity, and class.

First, it is important to examine how the love triangle between Bella, Edward, and Jacob and Katniss, Peeta, and Gale concludes. With Edward and Bella and Katniss and Peeta together, what does this say about race, class, and ethnicity? How do the romantic pairings of Katniss, Peeta, Bella, and Edward impact how the reader interprets interaction among different races, classes, and ethnicities? The white, higher class pairing within

both of these texts speaks largely to culture as a whole. There is also the concern of lack of racial and ethnic diversity within *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games* series. This lack of racial and ethnic variety speaks on a much broader scale than just the books; when leading men and women in stories, are predominantly white, our culture attributes positive characteristics to whites, more so than other races.

The intersectional critique of *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games* in regards to gender, race, ethnicity, and class, stress the problematic nature of Stephenie Meyer's story. Danielle N. Borgia's article "*Twilight*: The Glamorization of Abuse, Codependency, and White Privilege" demonstrates how these intersecting identities promote negative ideals:

The *Twilight* series' subtexts of white supremacy interact with its conservative gender ideologies to promote women's subordination to white men, described as protection and romantic love. The *Twilight* novels' ability to glorify self-sacrifice as passionate desire obscures their encouragement of women's subordination, passivity, and conformity. (Borgia 171)

As research has shown (Merskin and Silver), young adults, especially women (who are the majority of readers for *Twilight*), are significantly impacted by the literature they read. During such a crucial time in their lives with forming their identity and experiencing life changes, texts such as *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games*, that reinforce gender roles and negative images of race, class, and ethnicity, can influence their perceptions of self and others. The potential impact that *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games* could have on a young reader's life renders these series detrimental to how the reader views themselves and others.

The differences in Jacob and Edward's race and ethnicity call attention to the dominant representations facing minority groups and how these illustrations of identity affect the ideological relationship between race, ethnicity, and class. Edward's whiteness is evident from Bella's initial observations of the teen vampire: "I glanced sideways at the beautiful boy, who was looking at his tray now, picking a bagel to pieces with long, pale fingers" (Meyer 20). Within the first chapter of Meyer's book the connection between whiteness and beauty is established; proceeding forward, over the next four books, Edward's whiteness is mentioned numerous time, usually accompanying his pale complexion are words related to beauty, cleanliness, wealth, and even godliness. In contrast, Jacob's physical description in *Twilight* details the young man's skin color, but lacks the appreciation shown for Edward's whiteness: "As we got closer we could see the shining, straight black hair and copper skin of the newcomers, teenagers from the reservation come to socialize" (Meyer 117). Meyer's establishment of race and ethnicity are important when considering the socio-economic status assigned to both Edward and Jacob. Are the different identities (ethnicity/race/class) indicative of why Bella is attracted to Edward more so than Jacob? Meyer's choice to ascribe the leading man with whiteness and the sidekick friend with Native American ancestry, whether consciously or subconsciously, speaks on a larger, cultural scale. In "Civilized Vampires Versus Savage Werewolves: Race and ethnicity in the *Twilight* Series," Natalie Wilson explains that "Twilight, turning racial strife into a problem of vampire, werewolf, and human interaction, reflects the fact that racial divides are still prevalent" (Wilson 69). The racial, ethnic, and economic hierarchy of *Twilight* resembles not only dominant ideologies within society, but it also reinforces these ideologies for audience members.

The Hunger Games lacks even more diversity than its *Twilight* competitor. Both Gale and Peeta are presented as white male teenagers: Gale is described as having olive skin with dark hair (Collins 8) while Katniss describes Peeta as a boy with blonde hair and blue eyes (Collins 26, 30). While *Twilight* offers its audience more variation of racial and ethnic backgrounds than *The Hunger Games*, Collins' series similarly approaches the level of attractiveness of higher-class individuals to that of lower-class individuals based on specific identifications. Katniss' love triangle with Peeta and Gale is certainly complex and experiences dramatic dynamic alterations throughout the three books. Katniss struggles with her romantic interest in both men, unable to establish who is the better suitor for her until the end *Mokinjay*. On the surface, Katniss ultimately chooses Peeta as her partner due to extenuating circumstances that involve Gale's unintentional killing of Katniss' younger sister, Prim. While these circumstances significantly affect Katniss' choice, the class difference between Gale and Peeta do raise questions of influence. Initially, Gale's socio-economic status matches identically with that of Katniss': "[Gale] could be my brother. Straight black hair, olive skin, we even have the same gray eyes. But we're not related...most of the families who work the mines resemble one another this way" (Collins 8). Katniss' description of Gale speaks more to their similarities in their struggle of survival than their appearance. Peeta on the other hand, while still poor, does experience an easier life than Gale and Katniss. Peeta's ability to help Katniss, when they were children, alludes to Peeta's financial circumstances: "[Peeta] took one look back at the bakery as if checking that the coast was clear, then...he threw a loaf of bread in [Katniss's] direction. The second quickly followed" (Collins 31). Peeta's ability to assist Katniss during her family's famine

establishes a hierarchy between Peeta and Gale; Peeta's charity and his financial stability make him a more valuable suitor to Katniss.

Considering the only two prospective suitors for Katniss are white men, the next step is to ask where is the racial and ethnic diversity within *The Hunger Games* if not present in the immediate story? If none of the main characters are racially or ethnically diverse, what characters can we look to within the series to offer a sense of racial and ethnic inclusion? Unfortunately, the only two explicitly described Black characters within the book are District 11's Rue and Thresh. Suzanne Collins' physical description of both District 11 Tributes having "satiny brown skin" (Collins 98) confirms that these two characters are people of color. Initially, this inclusion of another race seems to provide *The Hunger Games* series with good intentions, but these intentions quickly sour once we assess the background and setting of District 11. In Kayla Hawkins' hollywood.com article, "A Look at District 11 Reveals the Darkest Idea in 'The Hunger Games'," *The Hunger Games* continues to perpetuate blatant racist attitudes towards people of color: "but in District 11, the agricultural farm district, there are some clear parallels being made to the American antebellum South. The District is full of fields that the citizens work through grueling hours, even into the night...the punishment for stealing, running away, or breaking any rules at all is being *publicly whipped*" (Hawkins). Considering that District 11 is potentially the poorest District within Panem and the indigenous population are Black living under these horrendous circumstances, Collins' book loses its once perceived forward thinking. The two explicit mentions of race on part of Collins' narration limits representations of entire groups of people; the inclusion of

minorities is limited and subservient to their white counterpart. Further, what is there to be said about the violent deaths of Rue and Thresh?

The relationship between Rue and Thresh in regards to their white counterpart, Katniss, and their subsequent defiance suggest punitive consequences for minorities who choose to operate against oppressive forces. But worse, their deaths also suggest a necessity for minorities to die protecting their white counterpart, such as Katniss. Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Emily D. Ryalls' critical study, "The Hunger Games: Preforming Not-preforming to Authenticate Femininity and Whiteness," tackles this subject:

Predictably, in this postracial context, characters of color are not developed—storylines do not focus on them nor are details given about their personal lives. Case in point, Rue is showcased as angelic primarily through her actions toward Katniss, saving Katniss by helping her outwit her captors and taking care of Katniss when she is sick. Rue's most significant role is as the innocent sacrifice that enables Katniss to win. Since only one Tribute can win (an exception is made for Peeta and Katniss as a romantic couple), the film's logic, with Katniss as the hero, dictates that Rue must die. Rue's death is poignant because she selflessly helps Katniss survive. (Dubrofsky and Ryalls 401)

Dubrofsky and Ryalls' observations provide an understanding of how these Black characters remain secondary to their white counterpart. Later within Dubrofsky and Ryalls' text, they state how this secondary presence of people of color perpetuates racial hierarchy: "Unfortunately, Katniss's performance of heroism troublingly fuses notions of authenticity and heroism with whiteness: people of color are present in the story, but they are not and cannot be the heroes. These characters work to center Katniss, and are

sacrificed to showcase her heroism” (Dubrofsky and Ryalls 407). The lack of awareness on part of the cannon’s characters introduces a concept of the naturalization of whiteness; this concept predicates not only the exclusion of other races and ethnicities, but also normalizes issues, such as discrimination and prejudice, that impact these minorities.

To say that Suzanne Collins or Stephenie Meyer, even considering these observations, intentionally created a racially, ethnic, and/or classist polarized series suggests a malicious subtext which I do not believe to be the case. What I do believe is the workings of a monolithic force within our culture and how this subconsciously influences how we perceive specific groups, especially out-groups. These racial, ethnic, and class stereotypes within *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games* do not reflect Stephenie Meyer or Suzanne Collins’ prejudice against minorities, but rather an inherent, learned knowledge of racial and ethnic hierarchy. If we take this research and apply it to our examinations of gender within both sets of texts and how intersectionality impacts different identifying factors of an individual, we can begin to see how characters like Bella, Edward, Jacob, Katniss, Peeta, Gale, Rue and Thresh marginalize genders, races, and ethnicities through their actions, behaviors, and thoughts. The next questions is, moving forward, will our sensitivity to these issues heighten, or will we remain a stultified audience, unaware and unalarmed by the negative representations of race, class, ethnicity, and gender that younger generations are consuming?

SECTION FIVE

After extensively researching and critiquing characters such as Bella Swan and Katniss Everdeen, the next question is: who is the better feminist character for young adults? Is there one female protagonist that is better than the other, that moralizes a more equality-based message? After reading countless reviews from academic and popular culture resources, most would argue that Katniss is the better heroine. While the District 12 Tribute certainly has positive characteristics, she is certainly not without faults. On the other hand, most critics would also argue that Bella is the antithesis of a positive female role model, one Internet picture even labeled her the worst thing to happen to feminism since the sandwich. But just as Katniss is not wholly feminist, neither is Bella wholly antifeminist.

Culturally, feminism has made tremendous strides within literature and the media, and the increased presence of strong female characters play a major role in how culture's view is shaped. To entirely denounce stories like *The Hunger Games* or *Twilight* refuses to acknowledge the positive impact that these stories have had on culture. Both female authors, Suzanne Collins and Stephenie Meyer embody positive role models for young women and men. Female authorship promotes creativity and monetary success, highlighting the writing and creative ability of women. These stories also encourage young women and men to read, promoting literacy and authorship among youth. These two series have gone on to produce entire franchises that have provided actresses, female authors, female directors, and other creative female professionals a chance to create unique work. In this respect, Stephenie Meyer and Suzanne Collins' works should be celebrated. Literacy,

authorship, independent financial success, encouraged creativity all represent positive outcomes of these two texts and need to be acknowledged as so.

Also, while these stories include problematic issues dealing with different social and cultural identities, readers are not always passively ingesting this material. The culture and idea of fanfiction has been around for centuries; stories have often been repurposed and reformatted by readers to spawn completely new, but influenced, stories. But what makes this century so spectacular, when examining fanfiction, is the accessibility of fan-based works due to the ease of Internet access. Entire websites are dedicated to readers creating stories inspired by creative works they love; fanfiction.net hosts an outlet for audience members to transform their favorite game, book, show, movie, cartoon, and more into something they envision. Entire chapter books have been inspired by fanfiction, and some works even make it into mainstream publication (*50 Shades of Grey* began as *Twilight* fanfiction). Visiting fanfiction.net leads to the discovery of thousands upon thousands of original stories created by audience members, all altering the original story in some way or another. The anonymity that fanfiction.net provides for fans limits statistical and demographic research as to who is posting on these forums, but regardless of who is writing these works, their message and content is extremely important to consider when contemplating how readers interact with problematic issues within texts like *The Hunger Games* and *Twilight*.

Fanfiction.net has over 136,000 page results for fan-written *Twilight* material. Stories include: alternate universe (AU), all human (AH), smut (erotic literature), satires, (femme)slash (same sex pairings), and countless other genres

that transform the original story of *Twilight* in some way or another. The stories of “Twisted New Moon,” “Your Absence,” and “Two Little Words” seem to embody this active participation in changing some aspect about *Twilight* in a positive manner, whether intentional or unintentional. In SeptemberSkies’ eight-chapter novel, “Twisted New Moon,” the story takes place within the cannon’s original setting, but instead of Bella falling in love with Edward, Bella chooses to pursue a romantic relationship with Jacob. As Bella is on her way to save Edward from the Volturi (the same events occurred in the original text), she narrates her choice to be with Jacob: “I wasn’t sure what would be worse; having to face Edward and tell him I had moved on, or getting there after it was too late...I guessed I would rather have to tell Edward I had moved on” (SeptemberSkies). Bella’s choice to not continue to pursue Edward after he left her demonstrates a stronger sense of independence for the protagonist. In the original text, Bella is incapable of living without Edward, and in this modified version the teenager seems to have greater authority over her personal choices. Similarly in “Two Little Words,” author GetBackToMe creates a narrative in which Bella chooses Jacob over Edward. Years after Edward initially leaves, he comes back to try to salvage his relationship with Bella, who has married Jacob, but the frustration and anger Bella feels towards Edward halt any romance. As Edward attempts to apologize, Bella stops him, exclaiming “If [Edward] were sorry [he] would’ve never broken [Bella’s] heart!” Angry, hot tears pooled down [Bella’s] cheeks as [she] yelled that last word to him. [She] had no idea how agitated [she] was with him” (GetBackToMe). Again, as SeptemberSkies demonstrated in their story, GetBackToMe’s choice to alter who Bella chooses speaks of their

dissatisfaction with Edward's behavior and Bella's lack of independence in the original text. Finally in "Your Absence," SlowScar romantically pairs Edward and Jacob, narrating their struggle to admit to one another their love. When Edward finally chooses Jacob over Bella, the couple celebrates intimately and talks about moving to London together. This radical change from heterosexual to homosexual romance potentially reflects the author's discontent with the lack of sexual diversity in Stephenie Meyer's original texts. These three fanfiction stories begin to unravel the complex relationship between reader and book; does the subject of a fanfiction piece act as a critique to the original text? Using Anna Silver's "*Twilight* is Not Good for Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*" from previous sections, Silver expounds upon how fanfiction can act as a critique of the original text, rather than just a perpetuation of problematic issues:

One must concede these shadings of the series' gender ideology because, even on fan message boards heavily stacked with Edward supporters, readers vigorously debate the degree to which Edward is too controlling, and whether he is a good model for a boyfriend in today's world. Meyer's novels are more nuanced, in other words, than some reviews suggest. (Silver 126)

Silver's observations explain how fan message boards actively critique the content within Meyer's series. The positive implications of fanfiction not only describe reader's active participation in changing problematic issues within the original text, but fanfiction also acts as a creative outlet for readers to try their own hand at writing fiction.

As demonstrated in the fanfiction of *Twilight*, the fanfiction produced from the original telling of *The Hunger Games* offers an eye-opening perspective from Collins' readers. Sara K. Day's "Pure Passion: The Twilight Saga, 'Abstinence Porn,' and Adolescent Women's Fan Fiction" articulates why fandom and the culture of fanfiction is so important to consider when critiquing popular culture works such as *The Hunger Games* and *Twilight*:

Angela Thomas asserts that adolescent women in fandoms tend to specifically approach fan fiction, as both writers and readers, in terms of the characters to whom they most immediately relate, who act as "a means for the girls to fashion new and emerging identities for themselves as they develop into adulthood" (160) (Day 34)

The stories "Everyone Has Needs" and "The 69th Hunger Games" provide fanfiction.net online users an opportunity to read a different story within the cannon of *The Hunger Games*. An overwhelming amount of fanfiction inspired by *The Hunger Games* involves smut, or erotic based literature. In the original story, sex is never mentioned in any of the books, the closest readers come to witnessing romance is a kiss or two shared by Katniss and Peeta or Katniss and Gale. It is not surprising that readers of Collin's book took to their own devices to create a more romantic, maybe even more realistic, representation of young adults. In "Everyone Has Needs," it is Katniss who initiates sex with Peeta during their first Hunger Games, telling the young man to "lay down," while she "[reaches] down...sliding his pants down" (Fanfictionally). As Fanfictionally narrates, Katniss takes control of the situation, commanding Peeta in different ways during their act of intimacy. This

authority and agency that Katniss demonstrates in “Everyone Has Needs” differs drastically from Katniss’ actions within the original story. This control, demand, and power not only take charge of Katniss’ sexuality, but also of her voice. Did author Fanfictionally intentionally write these scenes, after experiencing frustration from the original text? If not, can this text be the result of a subconscious reaction to *The Hunger Games*? While it is impossible to guarantee an answer, Day’s evidence offers a psychological explanation as to why Fanfictionally chose to alter the story in that specific way. Another example where one of *The Hunger Games*’ characters experiences a dramatic change in personality is the story “The 69th Hunger Games” by MissBakesMissStakes. MissBakesMissSteaks’ reworking of Johanna Mason’s character involves the District Seven Tribute winning the Hunger Games. What makes this rendition of Johanna intriguing is the drastic change in characterization Johanna receives from the start of the story to the end of the story. At first, she appears weak, described as “sobbing hysterically,” (MissBakesMissStakes) but once she enters the Hunger Games, Johanna quickly realizes her strength and capacity as a Tribute. As she relies on her resilience and family’s gift during the games, she eventually wins and in turn the Capitol kills her family. MissBakesMissStakes describes how Johanna’s “emptiness, sadness, and hidden tears turned back into rage...her anger couldn’t be contained. She was even more outspoken since they had no one to use against her. She became an official member of the rebellion” (MissBakesMissStakes). The audacity and fierceness that the author soaks Johanna in restores power to the powerless girl at the beginning of the story. Is this author making a statement on how they view the threatening nature of politics when

women succeed in powerful positions? Again, it is uncertain the true intention of MissBakesMissStakes, but a close reading of their work, knowing the psychology of fanfiction, certainly prompts investigation and question.

Taking characteristics from Katniss Everdeen and Bella Swan as well as other important female popular culture figures, there are aspects within each of these characters that may contribute to a positive, all encompassing feminist role model. Katniss' physical and mental strength or Bella's assertiveness and persistence demonstrate strong characteristics within females. Exempting characteristics such as passivity, male dependence, and exploitation of sexuality that Katniss and Bella demonstrate begins to provide a more feminist, equal character. Even more, as demonstrated in previous sections, intersectionality also plays a key role in developing truly feminist characters. Eliminating the hierarchy of race, class, and ethnicity demonstrated within *The Hunger Games* and *Twilight* provides a more neutral, equal depiction of different socioeconomic statuses, races, ethnicities, and genders. In a perfect feminist text/story, characters of different races, gender, ethnicities, economic classes, sexualities, and other social indicators would exhibit an equal footing, not one individual better than another for any reason related to their social or physical identities. The equality demonstrated in this idealized feminist literature would eliminate a social ladder, a text where the hierarchy of identity did not dictate a character's worth. Femininity is not the issue in question, wearing pink or washing the dishes does not negate feminist attitudes. Rather, the limitation of gender roles and the rigid structure that it imparts on our culture is detrimental to the concept of femininity. When characters, like Katniss, are told that

an audience will not like them without presenting a feminized version of themselves that is when femininity becomes problematic, when it is a performance, a set guide for women to follow in order to appear pleasing. Gender neutrality does not mean wearing only grey ambiguous articles of clothing, it means pursuing and accomplishing what you want regardless of your biological state; a woman hunting with a bow and arrow or a man cooking dinner and tending to his children while his wife is at work no longer become rare, but rather simple actions completed by human beings.

The cultural impact, both positive and negative, of *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games* speaks volumes to how much interaction a reader can have with a book. The strength, persistence, and wit that Bella and Katniss demonstrate lay a feminist foundation for these characters. Unfortunately, these structures are hollow, as their male dependence, exploitation of sexuality, and lack of agency limit their actions and behaviors. Bella and Katniss are female characters a step in the right direction, but in order to fully evolve as feminist literature the need for strong female characters has not been met, yet. The psychological impact that these characters can have on young adults, especially females, requires caution when approaching these texts. Reading *Twilight* or *The Hunger Games* among young adults should be encouraged, but the silence that follows has to change - a solution to this a pedagogical approach. Using these series in the classroom can offer young adults the chance to actively read these stories and to have a space to voice their concerns and critiques of the problematic material and to offer their own take. When young adults are given the opportunity to take a novel like *Twilight* or *The Hunger Games* and academically

approach the material, we could potentially eliminate the negative impact these texts may have on young men and women.

Conclusion

The cultural phenomenon of the *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games* series is certainly worth academic and cultural inquiry. The unique population that majorly reads these texts only adds to the curiosity of the series' impact. Placing *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games* in conversation with each other have enlightened me on how I approach both sets of texts. Initially, before I began my research, I strongly detested *Twilight*; I truly believed that there were no redeeming qualities about the series. Of course after reading and researching Bella Swan, I no longer think this is the case. Bella Swan does have redeeming qualities, she does exhibit strong female characteristics, and I absolutely think that her character's existence within popular culture is not entirely negative. And just as I denounced *Twilight*, I did not approach *The Hunger Games* with any skepticism. I thought of Katniss Everdeen as most others do: a strong female role model for young adults. While I still believe that young adults can absolutely experience empowerment from characters like Katniss Everdeen, there are also larger issues with *The Hunger Games*. Examining the gender politics as well as the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and class within these two series has opened my eyes to the ominous and pervasive nature of the negative stereotypes held against men, women, people of color, and socioeconomic statuses. As I stated and supported previously, these two texts and their negative themes/images do not necessarily speak to explicit prejudices and stereotypes held by Suzanne Collins and Stephenie Meyer, rather it connotes how culture subconsciously impacts how we see, view, and interact with cultural identities.

If given more time, I would welcome the opportunity to continue my research of these two texts, especially in relation to fanfiction. As I researched the endless pages of

fanfiction.net I was overwhelmed to see how many people dedicate their time and talent to recreating and repurposing stories. The ability to study this site empirically might offer tremendous insight as to not only who created these texts but also why the need exists to modify the texts. I was unaware of the fanfiction world before my research, and I have only begun to understand the complex inner workings of fanfiction.net and the users generating content using the anonymous cloak of their faceless usernames. The potential ability to gather demographic data and statistics about users, such as age, gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, etc., would provide even greater comprehension of fanfiction culture and its impact on readership. A fanfiction case study that could be particularly compelling to research is E.L. James' *50 Shades of Grey*, a fanfiction piece inspired by *Twilight*. Investigating the origin of the story and finding it online in its original text might offer other users' feedback and interaction with James' story. What do other fanfiction users have to say about *50 Shades of Grey*? Do they find it worrisome like I do, or is it celebrated within the fanfiction community? The ability to answer these questions and more contribute to a better understanding of how readers/fans interact and manipulate texts of their liking, and in turn, speak to a larger scale of cultural influence and impact of young adult literature.

Ultimately, after concluding my research and writing, I plan to use my newly acquired knowledge to inform, educate, and facilitate meaningful discussion. As I suggested in my fifth section, these books, regardless of their potential negative images/themes, do not require absolute rejection. Instead I suggest that the books' reading and subsequent discussions takes place within the structure of rigorous academics and educational institutions where young adults are challenged to think more critically,

through instruction and thoughtful discussion, to handle problematic issues and themes contained within texts such as *The Hunger Games* and *Twilight*. My suggested approach has been the standard for evaluating and learning from various forms of fiction for hundreds of years and is no less important and needed for today's literary works. Approaching these texts with a pedagogical foundation ensures that audience passivity is reduced and replaced with active, questioning engagement.

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